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ABSTRACT

This paper examines language in a factory setting and focuses on: (1) language workers use to express attitudes toward work areas, jobs and workers associated with them (Hymes, 1974); (2) behavior workers exhibit in relation to their socially defined status (Fishman 1970; Tyler 1971); and (3) speech forms workers use for particular situations and styles (Gumperz, Hymes 1972). The paper shows that: (1) workers socially stratify their work environment with the labels they use for other workers and jobs; (2) there is a correlation between the social stratification the workers recognize and the social and linguistic behavior they exhibit; and (3) the preferred linguistic forms for careful and casual speech of workers may be correlated with the social categories they represent. The results discussed in this paper illustrate that studying language in a work setting provides an opportunity to examine the relationship between socio-economic factors and communicative behavior because different generational, occupational and social groups may be observed within a common environment. (Author)

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Social Stratification and Linguistic Correlates of Factory Workers[1]

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Abstract

This paper examines language in a factory setting and focuses on: (1) language workers use to express attitudes toward work areas, jobs and workers associated with them (Hymes, 1974); (2) behavior workers exhibit in relation to their socially defined status (Fishman 1970; Tyler 1971); and (3) speech forms workers use for particular situations and styles (Gumperz, Hymes 1972).

The paper shows that: (1) workers socially stratify their work environment with the labels they use for other workers and jobs: (2) there is a correlation between the social stratification the workers recognize and the social and linguistic behavior they exhibit; and (3) the preferred linguistic forms for careful and casual speech of workers may be correlated with the social categories they represent.

The results discussed in this paper illustrate that studying language in a work setting provides an opportunity to examine the relationship between socio-economic factors and communicative behavior because different generational, occupational and social groups may be observed within a common environment.

Introduction

This article focuses on the speech differences of social classes which were defined by factory workers. It is part of a larger study which examined the social system of a factory through the communicative behavior of the workers.[2] A china factory located in New Castle, Pennsylvania, was examined as a speech community using a case method of research with participant observations and interviews. The background of the factory and community were explored and the social characteristics of workers were examined. A sample of 151 informants was selected by plant seniority and departmental affiliation.[3] The sample represented 12½% of the total work force and three generations of workers from all sections and occupational levels of the plant. The interview included a reading designed to elicit the regional dialect as careful speech[4] and a free narrative type questionnaire designed to elicit the workers' definitions of their environment as casual speech.[5] Photographs were used to stimulate work-related conversations and help elicit casual speech during the interview. Conversations observed outside the interview were used to support the analysis of speech styles.[6]

Factory Operations and Their Social Definitions

The major operations at the factory include forming, firing, decorating and warehousing. The flow of production begins in the back of the factory where the raw materials are mixed in preparation for the forming of ware. After the ware is formed it is fired. Bisque 'first fired' ware is then decorated, sprayed with a glass film, fired again and lines of gold or platinum are applied before a final lower temperature firing. The last stage of production takes place in the warehouse departments located at the front of the plant where ware is given a final inspection before packing and shipping.

The factory employs 1253 workers, half of whom are women. The division of labor in union is such that men perform central operations such as operating machines or driving vehicles and women perform ancillary functions such as removing ware from conveyor belts, sponging newly formed ware or polishing and grinding ware after firing. Only in decorating departments do women perform the central operations such as applying decals or hand painting ware.

Management workers comprise a sixth of the total labor force, a third of whom are women. Men in management positions work as foremen, office managers, engineers or

executives. Women work as clerks or secretaries. No women works in a supervisory position in management and no man works as a clerk or secretary.

Affiliation with a certain department determines the type of job which workers have, the area in which they work, the terminology which they must master and the general attitudes which they have toward their work environment, such as perception of duties, knowledge of departmental and factory operations, definitions of job pressures and concern for product quality and supervision.

Jobs which workers prefer are either those which are socially defined as "more prestigious" or those which are located in departments defined in that way. Union salaries are based on seniority and job skill rating. Since every department offers jobs with various skill ratings, workers who become affiliated with a particular work area and like it, may choose to remain there, even if it is not considered a prestigious place to work, provided they can acquire a higher skill rating and consequently a higher salary.

The manner in which workers discuss job preferences and work areas results in a social stratification of the factory. They evaluate certain sections of the plant and

certain departments as "lower" or "higher" prestige places to work. Their comments reveal underlying reasons for their attitudes toward highly skilled jobs and for their social definitions of them.

The most common attitudes expressed by workers about the forming departments at the back of the plant are negative and focus on the working conditions, both physical and emotional. The work areas are "messy" and "the pressures are great." Consequently few workers express a desire to work there and most workers consider forming departments the least prestigious places to work, except for those of the labor gang.

Attitudes toward firing departments are generally favorable and those areas are thought to be higher in status than forming departments. The firing areas are located in the middle and front sections of the factory and are cleaner than forming areas and have less job pressures, except near conveyor belts. Consequently the firing departments are considered more prestigious places to work.

Decorating departments represent the most important sphere of activity for women who want to get ahead in the pottery. Women who work as gold liners and platinum liners represent the most important high-status groups

for women. The departments are generally clean and they are located in the front section of the factory.

Attitudes toward warehousing departments are similar to those for decorating departments regarding status and prestige. Warehousing jobs are most often cited by young union men as those they want. Their high status is also recognized by foremen.

Members of the union's two most divergent groups, the long hairs 'young men who wear long hair and dirty jeans' and union officials including a past president belong to the labor gang. The status of the labor gang is the lowest in the factory and is partly the result of tradition. In the past all new workers were assigned to the labor gang and "worked up to better jobs." Although today workers are assigned directly to the departments which need them, the stigma that the labor gang is the department with the "newest" and "greenest" workers remains. Tasks which the labor gang performs such as janitorial services, the lack of personal work space and the general appearance of the long hairs also contribute to the low status of the labor gang.

It is apparent that there are discrepancies in the definable social positions of workers and their job skill

ratings and salaries. Some highest status groups have high skill ratings and relatively high salaries, other groups of lower status have high skill ratings and make higher salaries than the highest status groups. In this sense some high status jobs within the union are like some white collar jobs. They represent a relatively high social position but command less money.

The statuses of management jobs and the salaries which accompany them are compatible with their formal assignement by the corporation. Women occupy the lowest status in management and receive the lowest pay. Foremen receive higher salaries than women but less than many highly skilled union workers and less than other male management workers. Office managers and engineers receive slightly more pay and executives receive the highest salaries.

The workers' comments about other jobs and work areas has indicated that they perceive them as socially stratified. Their labels for other workers who occupy certain positions in the organization also point to a social stratification. Union workers label union supervisors, foremen, the industrial relations director, engineers, personnel directors, and "other office managers" as uppers. Division managers, sales executives, quality

and production managers, plant superintendents, and the plant manager are labeled higher-ups. Other management personnel are labeled salaried workers or management workers. Workers often use expressions such as 'he's company' or 'she's management'. Although the labels are used synonymously, company is the preferred form.

Union workers identify the union as 'the union' or 'the bargaining unit.' Union officials include officers, grievance men, which also apply to grievance women, trustees, and guards. Union workers identify one another with labels such as members, hourly workers and union. Queens is the label given to the female platinum liners and long hairs label the young men described in the labor gang.

Management workers use the labels in the same manner except that they may use workers for union members and they prefer the label officers to officials. Both management and union workers label workers with thirty years or more seniority insiders or olders and all others outsiders or newcomers. Both groups label the factory the pottery and label the administrative organization of the factory as company or management.

Worker Behavior and Status

The behavior of workers often reflects their status in the factory. Just as "...sales girls in large department stores tend to borrow prestige from their customer, or at least make an effort in that direction..."[7] so too highly-skilled factory workers who have had impressed upon them the importance of their customers tend to borrow prestige from them.

Workers who are periodically observed on the job by visiting dignitaries from the State Department, the White House and foreign governments are affected by such attention. They tend to view their positions at the factory as "more important" and of "highest status." As a result, their behavior reflects their beliefs about the rights and obligations associated with their high status in the pottery. Other pottery workers are affected by their behavior and also assign them this status.

Model makers, hand painters, artists, certain cup maker teams and jiggerman-batterout teams who all have high seniority and status in the plant assume positions of authority by settling work group disagreements with their comments. Coworkers will often seek their advice about business and personal problems. If the men stop for beer after work the high status worker initiates

the buying of drinks.

In contrast, members of the labor gang exhibit behavior analygous to "self fullfilling prophecy." Their general behavior and dress reflect their low status in the factory. They may seek advice but their advice is seldom saught by workers outside their own group. They do not settle out group disputes nor do they make comments during general worker discussions.

Management men who hold lower management jobs differ to the wishes of middle management men and the latter will differ to the wishes of executives. The general behavior of management men is worker-oriented. They do not wear jackets or suits in the plant. They literally "roll up their sleeves" when problems arise and they share job terms and adapt the speech forms used by workers in different sections of the plant.[8]

Linguistic Correlates of Status

Communicative situations at the factory prompt different speech styles. Although formal situations are a normal part of the factory activity, both management and union attempt to keep business relationships "informal." Their attempts result in unconscious admustments. A number of management men from all categories communicate with non-factory business associates who visit the plant. Their

speech patterns with he outside business contacts generally include prestigious forms for the linguistic items discussed in the following pages. Yet the same management workers use stigmatized forms[9] for the same items when talking with pottery workers who use them.

Stigmatized forms which management workers most often use are those for third person verbs and past tense verbs. Management workers from all age groups use some stigmatized forms in casual speech, with workers on the job, especially in the workers' territory. Although some management personnel use the forms in their office, with union workers or coworkers, a few top executives use stigmatized forms only in the union departments.

Management workers who are in close, daily contact with union workers are most apt to imitate the latter's speech habits. Their ability to shift styles unconsciously is illustrated by the speech pattern of the industrial relations director, who after the research, maintained that he never switched styles which included "bad grammar." Only after I had shown him transcriptions of his speech during a conversation with me, using careful speech and prestigious forms, and transcriptions of his speech during a subsequent telephone conversation with a union worker in which he used stigmatized forms, which he called "bad

grammar," did he realize his speech patterns included such forms. The following is an example of the shift in styles which he made in a thirty-second interval. "You folks...," "Well, he doesn't...," "Those..." were expressions he used during his conversation with me. A few moments later a grievance man called on the telephone to discuss the problems of a worker under his jurisdiction. When the industrial relations director answered the telephone he said, "Heh, yeah, youz guys really cleaned us last night..." He discussed the previous night's party and then the discussion turned to the union worker's problems. Before the conversation was concluded, the industrial relations director had used expressions such as, "He don't...," and 'them ones."

In addition to his facility to adopt stigmatized forms rapidly and in a natural manner, he and other Italian management workers easily slip into what they call "an Italian dialect", with gestures, when talking informally with Italian union workers outside work. Neither management nor union workers use ethnic forms in business conversations at the factory.

Union workers who use ethnic forms do so to emphasize a statement with a one word comment or to joke about

an experience outside the factory but they do not use ethnic forms to communicate job-related information. The tendency of workers to use regional and local forms rather than ethnic forms is a fundamental characteristic of the factory. Workers bring their individual speech habits to the job but they quickly adopt forms which are generally used and accepted by the majority of workers. Ethnic identification as a social characteristic indicates a tendency for certain linguistic behavior but it does not determine it.[10]

Workers might exhibit deviant forms which are associated with their department or work group in the factory but they do not exhibit forms from other groups outside the factory when discussing work-related subjects. In this sense the factory imposes its own communicative system on the workers so that they select the factory forms in preference to other forms which their repertoire might include.

Thus class differences may be reflected by social and linguistic behavior but class rank is not determined by it. Although many union workers exhibit characteristics commonly associated with the working class and many management workers exhibit characteristics commonly associated with the middle class, no single characteristic

adequately divides the workers into social classes. If a combination of characteristics is used a number of workers share characteristics with groups which are often associated with two different classes.[11]

It is more realistic to approach the problem of social stratification and linguistic forms from the standpoint of workers and the labels they use to differentiate and evaluate the jobs and the people who hold them.

If a comparison is made of the careful forms for items elicited during the reading and casual forms for the same items transcribed from free narrative and observed conversations, it is apparent that not all workers share the same features representative of the two speech styles. The careful style of some informants is similar to the casual style of others.

The difficulty of eliciting items in casual speech limited the selection for analysis to <u>didn't</u>, <u>doing</u> and <u>began</u>. The shift from careful to casual speech includes obvious changes in one or more of the forms and subtle changes in the general delivery of all the forms. Some workers never use the stop [d] in <u>didn't</u>, the [Iŋ] form in <u>doing</u> nor the [æ] form in <u>began</u> for careful speech. Thus no single item can be taken as an indicator of a

particular speech style for everyone, nor can any item be used for comparison which does not occur naturally in casual speech.

Chart 1 illustrates the distance between the careful style of some workers who have a broad linguistic base and other workers whose base is narrower and rests at the other end of the range. The chart also shows that the two styles overlap.

Those workers who have not been exposed to many groups through familial, educational or occupational channels exhibit a narrow usage range between careful and casual forms, not so much in a difference of the forms but in the frequency of their selection as forms to be used for both styles. In addition, their range rests at the casual end of the combined total ranges. The usage range of workers who, because of contacts through familial, educational or occupational channels, have been exposed to many different groups, is wider and rests at the careful end of the combined total ranges.

Basic speech habits are acquired from one's family but interaction with social groups outside the family imposses certain linguistic requirements which act to reinforce and/or modify one's usage pattern. Exposure to the communicative behavior of many different groups

provides opportunities to select and adopt new speech forms from a broad linguistic field. It also provides opportunities to become acquainted with the manner in which linguistic forms are used in different situations. Adoption of new linguistic habits pre-supposes a need for and an awareness of the prestigious quality of some forms.

Examples of the pressures from one's linguistic base a result of the habit of selecting certain forms from one's repertoire, are evident from the careful speech of the workers who misread the following grammatical forms in the reading:

Her cat had ran down the road. Union Male III

She begin to cry. Union Males I, II, III and Management Male III

If rain doesn't (didn't) wash... Union Female III

If rain don't wash... Union Male I

The ability to alter one's speech to fit the situational requirements is illustrated by management workers who corrected themselves during the reading and by management workers who used prestigious forms in careful speech and other forms in casual speech.

She begin, er she began to cry... Management Males I, II, III

Her cat had ran, eh, that's run..Management Male III

It doesn't matter... Management Male I (careful speech)

Hell, it don't matter...Management Male I (same speaker casual speech)

Evidence that workers attempt to alter their speech patterns on the job points to their awareness of social and class differences. These differences are more clearly defined when particular speech forms are examined in relation to the particular labels of speakers who use them.

Chart 2 shows the preferred forms of the careful and casual speech used by the workers from various occupational levels they defined. Note that the spelling pronunciation of didn't never occurs in casual speech. The preferred form for all groups is [ϕ]. Although some management workers make obvious shifts from [d] to [ϕ] in didn't, a number of higher-ups retain some semblance of an alveolar [d] but it is not as pronounced and in some cases barely audible. Older higher-ups show the weakest [d]. Other subtle changes in the form of the item include final [t] which is often "swallowed" or assimilated to [n] in casual speech.

Some management uppers, union officials and hourly workers and members whose casual style include the [ϕ] form in didn't, show a very weak alveolar glottal closure

combination [t$^{?}$] or a weak [d] in careful speech. The loss of apparent glottal stop in casual speech points to some social value for the form as, perhaps, imitative of voiced [d] which is used by higher-ups in both careful and casual speech.

The change of forms for doing is a good indicator of speech styles and social awareness although it cannot be used by itself as an indicator of styles. Some higher-ups may retain the [In] form in casual speech, but the majority of workers use the [ən] form.

The different forms for began in casual speech indicate that both management and union workers change forms, although management workers generally do not show as high a percentage for [ɪ] as other workers, and higher-ups do not use the form. When the usage pattern changes for uppers, officials and union members the change is from [æ] to [E] or from [E] to [ɪ]. Because of the grammatical implications of the form it is necessary to distinguish between phonological choices and grammatical choices. For example, the ambiguous nature of [ɪ] as an extreme range of [æ] necessitates checking the linguistic habits of those workers who used the [ɪ] form in the reading.

If the informants were overheard using other non-

standard past tense forms it was taken as an indication that their choice of [ɨ] represents a grammatical one. For example, the following comments were observed in formal contexts when union and management workers were discussing job lags in some departments or job problems related to the union in general:

> Well we begin to work on them yesterday. Union Male II
>
> We run out of clay before noon. Union Male I
>
> We begin to think you weren't coming. Management Male III

Other workers who used the [æ] form for began in the reading and the [ɨ] form in free narrative but who are consistent in their use of other past tense verbs may or may not select [ɨ] as a phonological variant. They may use past tense began in careful speech and present tense begin in casual speech, although it is unlikely if they are consistent in their use of other past tense forms in casual speech.

The preferred linguistic forms for the various social categories defined by the workers illustrate that their definitions of status accurately stratify the factory population in terms of linguistic usage. There are no demarcation lines between usage levels, but an overlapping distribution resulting in a continuous gradation.

The above discussion illustrates that using the workers' definitions of their environment as the basis for analysis results in a classification that is more realistic than any pre-defined arrangement a researcher might impose.

Footnotes

1. This paper is a partial result of my research done as a Maxwell Fellow for the Department of Anthropology at Syracuse University.

2. Occupational jargon is the main concern of my doctoral dissertation in which a basic assumption is that linguistic processes and social forces which operate in more general settings also operate in a factory setting. My working definition of occupational jargon is: the combination of regional and local speech forms, individual speech styles, and technical terminology associated with a particular occupation.

3. The plant seniority of individuals refers to their seniority category: Category I represents 0-8 years; Category II represents 9-19 years; and Categoey III 20-60 years. Departmental affiliation refers to particular work areas within the factory.

4. The reading was a short paragraph which contained words that help to identify a western Pennsylvania speaker. For a complete discussion of generational variation and linguistic forms see P. Tway, "Speech Differences of Factory Worker Age Groups," Studies in Linguistics, 25 (1975).

5. The questionnaire was presented in a conversational manner and focused on work at the factory level, the departmental level and the personal level.

6. For an in-depth discussion of careful and casual speech see P. Tway, "The Careful and Casual Speech of Factory Workers," Studia Linguistica (1976).

7. I agree with William Labov's statement in, The Social Stratification of English in N.Y.C. (Washington: Center For Applied Linguistics, 1966), p. 9, that "...a person's own occupation is more closely correlated with his linguistic behavior...for those working actively... than any other single social characteristic."

8.For a discussion of usage variations of factory terms based on departmental affiliation see P. Tway, "Workplace Isoglosses: Lexical Variation and Change in a Factory Setting," Language in Society, 4 (1975).

9. Stigmatized forms are those forms which New Castle speakers consider "not right," "bad grammar," or "not good English."

10. This phenomenon supports the observations of Werner Leopold, "The Decline of German Dialects," in Readings in the Sociology of Language, J. Fishman, ed. (The Hague:Mouton, 1970), p. 346. Immigrant workers of

different ethnic backgrounds attempt to adopt the speech habits of the work unit rather than retain their own and for this reason those workers will acquire the local dialect faster than other immigrants who are not actively engaged in an occupation.

11. Younger union men share several characteristics with management workers such as more education and more geographical mobility. Older management men and all management women share several characteristics with union workers such as lack of college education, more geographical stability and similar neighborhood affiliation.

CHART 1

Careful Styles

didn't	d ~ t$^{?}$ ~ ϕ	didn't	d ~ t$^{?}$ ~ ɾ ~ ϕ
doing	Iŋ ~ ən ~ in	doing	Iŋ ~ in ~ ən
began	æ ~ E ~ ɨ	began	E ~ æ ~ ɨ

Casual Styles

didn't	d ~ ϕ ~ t$^{?}$	didn't	ϕ ~ d ~ t$^{?}$
Doing	n ~ Iŋ ~ in	doing	ən ~ Iŋ ~ in
began	E ~ æ ~ ɨ	began	E ~ ɨ ~ æ

The order in which the forms are placed indicates the preferred usage for the major groups represented. Although the forms on the left are most representative of the management groups and the forms on the right are most representative of the union groups, the illustration does not accurately portray individual usage since several informants did not follow the general pattern of the group to which they belonged. The illustration is meant to serve as a general indicator of the styles and their ranges.

CHART 2

Social Stratification by workers

			Careful	Casual
Company/Management				
Higher-Ups	Plant Manager Superintendents Production Managers Sales Executives Division Managers	didn't doing began	d Iŋ æ	d ~ ϕ Iŋ ~ ən æ ~ E
Uppers	Office Managers Personnel Engineers Industrial Relations Director Foremen Supervisors	didn't doing began	d~t' Iŋ æ ~ E	ϕ ən E ~ ɪ
	Salaried Workers	didn't doing began	d~t' Iŋ~in E~æ	ϕ ən E ~ ɪ
Bargaining Unit/Union				
Officials	President Vice President Turstees Secretary Treasurer Guards Grievance Men	didn't doing began	d~t' Iŋ~in E~æ	ϕ ən ɪ ~ E
	Hourly Workers Members	didn't doing began	d~t'~ɾ Iŋ~in E	ϕ ən ɪ
	Queens	didn't doing began	d Iŋ~in æ~E	ϕ ən E~ɪ
	Long Hairs	didn't doing began	t' in~Iŋ æ~E	ϕ ən E~ɪ
	Olders/Insiders		Newcomers/Outsiders	
	didn't d doing Iŋ		didn't t' doing in	